

## Introduction

This is the third volume in a series of publications entitled *East Asian Maritime History (EAMH)*, which presents results of the research project “The East Asian ‘Mediterranean’”, generously sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation since May 2002. As in the first and second volumes, I have included contributions by closely cooperating partners as well as those by the permanent project staff. The recent research results of Barbara Seyock will now not be published in this volume, since they are to form a separate monograph (her Habilitation thesis).

While the main emphasis in the first volume of *EAMH*, “Trade and Transfer across the East Asian ‘Mediterranean’”, was on commodity transfer and academic exchange in the field of medicine, and the second volume concentrated on perceptions of maritime space in traditional Chinese sources, the focus of this third volume is aspects of the political economy and *raison d'état* of East Asian countries – the countries neighbouring the East Asian “Mediterranean”, as I called them elsewhere – especially against the background of East Asia’s integration into the “international” trade of that time. The reader will soon discover that the eighteenth century plays a key role in many contributions, and time and again will meet with groups of persons who played a particular role within the exchange networks of this early modern period, such as monks acting as diplomats or translators.

The contributions progress from the general to the particular. My own contribution “The East Asian maritime world ...” takes a broad perspective, intended as a general outline of the political and economic history of this macro-region. I first say a few words on the idea of a “modern economic revolution” in East Asia – a topic which also is indirectly touched on in the second contribution by Ng Chin-keong – and the “East Asian world order” in ideology and reality. Subsequently, my article investigates the political economies of China, Korea, Japan, and the Ryūkyū Islands in order to analyze their impact on supra-regional and “international” exchange relations in East Asia during the “age of global integration”. As a rule, only those developments I consider to be of importance to historical changes or details in the East Asian maritime world are characterized and explained.

The article by Ng Chin-keong “Qing China’s perception of the maritime world...” expounds how the Qing (1644–1911) court perceived the maritime world in the eighteenth century, that is, during a time when China witnessed an apogee of prosperity and had built up a powerful land empire. Towards the end of this century, however, the glorious days of the vast Chinese empire came to an end. Against this historical background Ng provides a very plausible explanation as to why the Chinese government – despite keeping an extremely cautious eye on its maritime borders – for a long time “misjudged” the threat from the emerging European maritime powers. In a nutshell, the political economy and the *raison d'état* of China, which differed fundamentally from that of the European countries at that time, played the decisive role.

Li Kangying 李康英 looks at China’s commercial and maritime trade development over the long period from the Song (960–1279) through the Yuan (1279–1367) until the Ming (1368–1644) dynasty, in particular China’s monetary policy – copper,

silver, and paper money. Centuries of flourishing maritime trade came to an abrupt end in 1371 when the Ming Emperor Hongwu 洪武 (r. 1368–1398) prohibited maritime trade – a decision directly linked to the political economy and the *raison d'état* of the early Ming rulers. By the sixteenth century, however, maritime trade and commerce were booming as never before. Against this background, Li Kangying describes how, due to China's particular *raison d'état* and her integration into the maritime world, supra-regional, “global” flows of money between China and the outer world developed.

The next two contributions concentrate on the northern edge of East Asian waters, namely Korea and China. Liu Yingsheng 刘迎胜 introduces sources reporting incidents of shipwrecks and castaways, analyzing the treatment of the latter by the Qing government during the *qianlong* period (1736–1795). Usually, the relationship between China and Korea is described as one between suzerain and tribute country or vassal. The records Liu Yingsheng investigates here show that Korean castaways and refugees from shipwrecks were generously provided with help by the Chinese. Their property was taken care of by Chinese local authorities and ordinary Korean people, in particular, benefited from this relationship. His sources thus provide an example of how it is often too simplistic to speak only of a sovereign-vassal relationship.

Using four basic Korean sources, Koh Heyryun 高惠蓮 studies the routes linking China and Korea across the sea known as the “East China Sea” in China and the “Korean West Sea” in Korea. Of special interest, particularly in the context of Chosŏn (1392–1910) history is the route between Cheju, Korea and Taizhou in Zhejiang province, China. Koh Heyryun subsequently concentrates on the sea route described by Choe Bu 崔溥 (1454–1504) in his *P'yohaerok* 漂海錄 (*Record of drifting* 1488) and finally compares it with the route taken earlier by the Northern Song 北宋 (960–1127) envoy Xu Jing 徐兢 (1091–1153) in his *Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* 宣和奉使高麗圖經 (*An illustrated description of the Chinese embassy to Korea during the xuanhe period*).

Oláh Csaba analyzes Sino-Japanese relations after the so-called “Ningbo Incident” of 1523, when competition between members of two Japanese embassies over the profits from the “tally trade” (*kanhe maoyi* 勘合貿易) with China led to a bloody clash and many Chinese casualties in Ningbo. The result was a big debate in China about Japanese tribute and official trade with Japan. Based on reports of Chinese officials investigating this incident, mainly preserved in the *Shuyu zhoubi lu* 殊域周咨錄 (*A comprehensive record of foreign countries*), Oláh reconstructs this debate, showing that officials frequently argued against future official relations with the Japanese because they considered their behaviour towards China in Ningbo as humiliating. It was not until 1539 that another official Japanese delegation was sent to China. A so-called “*Gozan* 五山-monk”, a Zen-monk from the *Rinzai*-school, named Sakugen Shūryō 策彦周良 (1501–1579), wrote a diary about this mission of 1539–40, the *Shotoshū* 初渡集 (*Account of the first mission*). Based on this diary, Oláh concludes by investigating the exchange of letters and short messages between the Chinese and Japanese diplomat-monks.

Li Jinming's 李金明 contribution focuses on the trade between China and Na-

gasaki 長崎 during the Qing period, with particular consideration of the importance of the metals trade. This was a period when Japan officially pursued her “*sakoku* 鎖國” policy and permitted only Chinese and Dutch merchants to trade with her merchants at designated ports. In fact, Japan had, for a long time, been very much dependent on imports, especially from China. However, as the government laid more emphasis on the development of her domestic economy and production, it soon recognized that the on-going flow of metals out of the country was very harmful to her national wealth. Consequently, the rulers sought to prevent metals, first silver then copper, from being exported in large quantities and imposed strict restrictions on the trade with China. These metals, on the other hand, were of major importance to the Chinese. The Chinese government, therefore, started to pay more attention to the promotion of domestic mining and minting of copper. One result was the gradual decline of the once flourishing China-Nagasaki trade.

Xie Bizhen 谢必震 and Lai Zhengwei 赖正维 analyze aspects of Sino-Ryūkyūan relations during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Xie investigates changes in East Asian waters from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. He focuses especially on the role of Ryūkyūan merchants as intermediaries in East Asian and Southeast Asian trade relations. This small island country possessed a particular geostrategic and socio-economic position within the East Asian “Mediterranean”, so when, in 1371, China initiated its maritime prohibition policy, Ryūkyū merchants were able partly to take over the role formerly filled by Chinese merchants, developing a wide-spread commercial network across Asian waters. However, with the renewed rise of maritime commerce in China in the course of the sixteenth century, the Ryūkyūs importance within this network gradually declined.

Lai Zhengwei concentrates particularly on the role and function of the so-called thirty-six families. They had moved from Fujian to the Ryūkyū Islands at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, and, as Lai shows, had an important impact on the economic development of the Ryūkyūs, especially in technical fields such as shipbuilding, though they also played a major role as diplomats, envoys, and interpreters.

In this context, Liao Dake's 廖大珂 contribution neatly rounds off the volume. He concentrates on an issue that is normally very much neglected in studies on the history of maritime trade – the role and influence of interpreters (*tongshi* 通事), not only in the Sino-Ryūkyūan trade, but generally in Asian waters. He takes the Qing dynasty as an example to introduce various kinds of interpreters, their social origins and official functions, which covered a much broader scope than is normally realised. His investigation may be taken as evidence for how important this kind of profession was, not only in Qing China's maritime trade and contacts between China and the West, but also between East Asian countries.